

Sermon Christmas 2020

The Rev. Canon Lorne Mitchell

A little over 2000 years ago... something was happening... not many people would have noticed it ... but something new was happening... In many ways a baby's cry is really quite an ordinary thing... and yet can anyone deny that something strange and mysterious had just begun?

Some say that a bright star was shining in the sky. In some ways this is not extraordinary. Around here on a cold winter's night out in the country we can see many stars. Some of them quite bright.

Some say that wise men, who were traveling, saw the star and used it to guide their way. This was not that extraordinary. In those days, many people traveled through the desert. It is always much cooler to travel by night, so they would often rely on the stars to tell them which way to go.

And they say that on this day, a child was born. A child came into the world and was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Again we couldn't think of this as extraordinary. That's exactly what happens several times a week over at the Stratford General Hospital... Could it be that this was something different?

Perhaps there was a star ... and perhaps travelers were drawn to it... could be... But one thing is absolutely certain. That night, a little child was born – and because of that, the world would never be the same again.

As he grew to maturity he was trained in the Hebrew Scriptures just like all the boys in his culture. But something strange and mysterious was unfolding. He began to teach and take on a special ministry – in fact - a special task.

Somehow, in the things he said and in the deeds he did, he awakened something deep in the hearts of those around him. It was as though they had become aware of a tremendous yearning. A yearning for forgiveness, compassion and love. A desire to be in a closer relationship with God.

Somehow, in what Jesus did and who he was, this yearning was fulfilled for them on a scale that they had never experienced before. On a scale they had never imagined before. In his life, and eventually, even in his death and resurrection, they experienced such abundant life that somehow they knew... they knew had been touched by God.

And the joy of this experience spread like wild fire across the land. So powerful was it, that it changed lives; it changed communities; it changed nations. From this experience burst forth tremendous creative energy.

The Christian story came to be told in prayers, poetry, songs and art. The Christian story has been passed on from one generation to another. Through it, people over the ages have experienced the abundant life that Jesus brought to the world.

But in our current society, many people are beginning to develop amnesia. They are beginning to forget where they come from spiritually.

They are beginning to forget the Christian story, and they are forgetting about an incredibly precious gift that has been given to them - the experience of abundant life that is offered to us. This is so sad, because the yearnings that people have today are still the same as those who lived long ago.

The world remains a broken world. It cries out for healing. Every day families in our society struggle with violence, drug abuse, marital breakdown and grief. From around the world we hear news of poverty, famine, disease and terrorism.

The lies and mistrust flooding onto the internet are creating as much harm and suffering as the pandemic. In the midst of all this we desperately yearn for peace...we yearn for forgiveness – we yearn for compassion – we yearn for love.

But where do people turn? Is there really anything else in our society that can fulfill these yearnings? Is there really anyone else who can give us hope?

Could it be that this little child that was born so long ago has something to say to us right here, right now? Could it be that he is very much still with us and wants to heal our wounds and fulfill our deepest yearnings? Could it be that we can receive courage and hope in the face of all we deal with in life?

Jesus said, whenever two or three are gathered, I am in the midst of you...Jesus is here in our midst. Whether we gather in person, on the phone, on Youtube, or on Zoom, Jesus says, I am in the midst of you... when you gather and tell the Christian story, when you gather to pray to our Creator God, Jesus says, I am in the midst of you...

So share with him your needs and yearnings... share the big stuff...

During this year of the pandemic we often feel like groaning and screaming about our needs and yearnings. Go ahead and do so... let it out... Jesus is in our midst and is ready to hold you.

And because of that, when you're strong enough, and when we're allowed to take off our masks... we will be ready...we will be ready to, like Jesus, reach out and hold one another. What a moment that will be.

Loving God our creator and
Loving one another...

This is what being in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is all about.

Here in this moment, there is no amnesia. We know who we are. We know we have come from God and we know what God has done for us through Jesus.

Even more than that, we know that the Christian story has not yet been completed. The book of Revelation wasn't the end of the story. I believe there are many thoughts and dreams in the mind of God that **have not yet come to fruition**. And you and I are part of those dreams. Perhaps God is looking for the right people to make them happen. Maybe you're one of them.

Right now, the human world needs you and I to do our part. For me it's exciting to think of the possibilities. With Jesus in our midst, the story continues... with you and me and our children.

Wherever you are his Christmas, may the God who was made flesh and dwelt among us, touch your heart and gently hold your deepest yearnings. May the child found in a manger long ago give you and your loved ones a peace which passes all understanding.

Amen.